

The sector has a responsibility to help consumers understand their options

THE ATTENDANCE of 2,000 people at our second care and ageing expo in Perth in August says to me that consumer-directed care is really taking hold in our industry and Australians are beginning to carefully consider their care options as they age.

The response also demonstrates there is a thirst for knowledge in the wider community to better understand how to age well and how the aged care system can support this.

The majority of attendees were aged care consumer age with 35 per cent aged 56 – 70 and 28 per cent aged over 70, and most were there seeking information for themselves (53 per cent) or a family member (39 per cent).

The aged care industry today has a much broader responsibility in terms of helping consumers



Sean Rooney, CEO of LASA

understand the options available to them as we enter an unprecedented period of competition and choice.

Now more than ever, the consumer has the opportunity to compare the market and make an informed decision about their aged care services.

In this context there are a

number of alternate models emerging including new designs and models of care in traditional residential care settings, along with other care and support services complemented by new technologies.

Retirement living and aged care in Australia is going through a period of significant innovation to meet the needs of those requiring age services. More older Australians will choose to remain living as independently as possible in their own retirement village with support and care delivered as and when they need it.

Events like the care and ageing expo help to break new ground by bringing together an innovating aged care industry and the consumer.

It provides unprecedented access to the latest information, education

and technologies around the choices across the aged care spectrum, while highlighting the compassion, professionalism and dedication displayed by aged service providers day-in and day-out right across our industry and the positive difference they make in the lives of older Australians.

It is also a powerful opportunity to enhance our industry's profile and add value to providers' reputation in their local communities.

These events are a doorway to building confidence and community support for Australia's aged services industry, not only for our day-to-day operational activities but also future-proofing these relationships to ensure our industry can grow and innovate to meet the needs of a rapidly ageing Australia. ■

Dementia is a matter of social health

I HAVE RECENTLY returned from Alzheimer's Disease International's conference in the United States and was inspired by the emerging research on dementia.

There is an increasing focus of research on both person-centred care and the importance of the social aspects of health care, such as relationships and meaningful activity.

While there are still strong research efforts focused on cure, there is also now a strong focus on disrupting or delaying the trajectory of dementia and with living well with dementia.

Dementia Alliance International, a peak body representing people with dementia across 55 countries, spoke about the need for hope and focusing on the positive.

Membership is only available to those with dementia and they have online support groups and a strong focus on advocacy, rights and improved quality of life. They had many

stories of the big difference support made to quality of life for people with dementia. Please recommend this group to anyone looking for peer support (see dementiaallianceinternational.org).

I was also pleased to see discussions around early diagnosis of dementia move from 'should we' to 'we must'. This is partly based on acknowledgment of human rights but also on the availability of services and activities that can improve quality of life for people with dementia.

For people in the early stages of dementia there is emerging evidence of the benefits of reducing risk factors and maintaining engagement and learning activities for living a good life with dementia.

For those with more advanced stages of dementia, a diagnosis can mean better care for conditions such as depression or agitation, as care research increasingly



Associate Professor Christine Stirling, president of the AAG

demonstrates what good care should look like.

Some research however showed many general practitioners are still reluctant to give a dementia diagnosis but hopefully this will change as GPs increasingly recognise the benefits of diagnosis.

Preparing and training the aged care workforce to care for people with dementia was also in focus. Some noteworthy training mentioned included the

University of Tasmania's Dementia MOOC and Dementia Australia's virtual reality training, which simulates the experience of dementia for care staff to help them change practice.

While I was in the US I also visited two universities renowned for their gerontological nursing education and research where it was fabulous to meet people who have dedicated their working lives to improving the experience of ageing.

It is important for us to keep an eye on the body of evidence that has already been generated about important events such as transition care and acute care for older people. There are plenty of promising developments that can help us all to improve the care we provide and the lives of older Australians. ■

